

businesses. I know I speak for all Americans when I say to the families who lost so much, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Today I'll be flying to Oklahoma City to get a firsthand view of the destruction. This is a duty I've performed many times in the aftermath of many natural disasters. One thing I've learned is that the images we see on television can never fully convey the level of sheer destruction or the depth of human grief caused by these disasters. Yet, I've also learned that the worst of nature can bring out the best in people.

At times like these, families rally together; neighbors help neighbors; strangers reach out to strangers; while police, doctors, firefighters put in 24-hour days in often hazardous conditions without complaint. Natural disasters create many victims but bring forth many heroes. There are some challenges that no individual, indeed, no community can handle alone. And on these occasions the National Government must act quickly, effectively, compassionately.

When I became President, I vowed that the Federal Government would do a better job of helping communities respond to the ravages of nature, and it has. As part of Vice President Gore's reinventing Government effort, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, under the direction of James Lee Witt, has gone from being much criticized to becoming a model of disaster relief, now recognized all around the world for its speed, skill, and dedication.

Officials from FEMA and other Federal agencies are already on the ground in communities hit by this week's tornadoes, healing wounds, searching for missing persons, providing shelter, clearing debris, restoring power and water, issuing emergency expense checks. But more must be done.

Today I'm glad to announce the Department of Labor will spend over \$12 million to provide temporary jobs for some 3,500 Oklahomans. Men and women who lost their jobs and businesses destroyed by the tornadoes will be paid to serve at relief centers, to distribute food and water, to help on construction crews. They'll be able to feed their families by rebuilding their communities.

I'm also announcing today that I'll ask Congress for an additional \$372 million for

FEMA's disaster relief fund. These resources are crucial for our disaster relief efforts, and I urge Congress to act quickly on my request.

Finally, in the balanced budget that I sent to Congress there is \$10 million to further improve the National Weather Service's next generation Doppler radar network. This system makes it possible to issue warnings in advance of coming tornadoes so that local residents can seek shelter. Over the last decade, average warning times have doubled from 6 minutes to 12 minutes. Residents of hard-hit Cleveland County, Oklahoma, received warnings a full 35 minutes before the tornado touched down there this week, and that warning saved lives. That's also why I support the creation of a national weather center for state-of-the-art tornado and severe storm forecasting at the University of Oklahoma.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to provide individuals with the tools they need to improve their own lives. That's what we're doing in Oklahoma this week. Natural disasters test our faith, but they also show us that the old-fashioned American values of neighborly care and concern are still very much alive. And they remind us of the enduring power of the American people to emerge from calamities even stronger.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6:03 p.m. on May 7 in La Colombe d'Or restaurant in Houston, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 8. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 8 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

### **Remarks Following a Walking Tour of Tornado Damage in Del City, Oklahoma**

*May 8, 1999*

Thank you very much. Governor Keating and Mrs. Keating; Congressmen Istook and Lucas. I don't know if Senator Nickles and—there he is, over there. Thank you very much.

We have, obviously, James Lee Witt, our FEMA Director, here with me, and Buddy Young, his Regional Director, and many others here: our SBA Administrator, Aida Alvarez; the Deputy Secretary of Housing and

Urban Development, Saul Ramirez; Mayor Lewis; Mayor Nelson; Mayor Reed; and a lot of other Oklahoma State officials who are here.

Let me say to all of you, I was talking last night to my wife, and we were remembering all the tornadoes that we dealt with when I was Governor of Arkansas. You may know that our two States have the highest incidents of tornadoes in the entire country. I have been going to these sites for 20 years, most of them with James Lee Witt, and this is the most devastating tornado I have ever seen. I have never seen so much complete destruction of homes over so wide an area. And of course, you know that at least for a couple of communities, the measurement of the tornado was virtually off the charts.

And I just want you to know—and I came into this neighborhood today, and I saw all these American flags sticking up, all the people rooting around in the rubble of their houses, looking for those family photos and the marriage licenses and the other records of family life, but with a strong spirit. It was profoundly moving to me.

And I want to say that our hearts go out to those who have lost so much and, obviously, especially to the families of those people who lost their lives. But we also thank you for setting an example of what is very best in this country, the way you have reacted to this.

I want to say a special word of thanks to the police and fire personnel, the National Guard, the Red Cross, all the people who volunteer, the young AmeriCorps volunteers over there, everybody who's been a part of this. I am very grateful. And I'd like to thank the citizens of Oklahoma. When the Governor said there had not been a single incident of looting, even though there had been no curfew, I think that says it all. And again, let me say to all of you, I am profoundly grateful.

There are a couple of things that I'd like to say that we're trying to do in addition to what you know already. FEMA has got a 1-800 number. We're trying to get in touch with all the businesses, as well as the homeowners and the people who have lost their cars and other things. But we also are today going to make available about \$12 million

from the Department of Labor, which will provide 3,500 temporary jobs that will be directed to people who lost their jobs because their businesses were taken out by the tornado.

And these jobs—though obviously they pay better, a lot better than unemployment compensation—so we can put several thousand people to work in the reconstruction process, everything from delivering water and food supplies to doing cleanup to actually helping on some of the construction crews. We'll be able to do that. We talked with your congressional delegation today, and we're going to look and see if we can do more.

But there will be several people here who will be out of their own jobs for months while the rebuilding occurs. And we're going to go back to Washington, try to figure out exactly how many people are going to be out of work, for how long, and try to make sure we can provide funding for work that actually needs to be done. We don't have to make up these jobs—you can look around. There's a lot of work that needs to be done here. So we'll try to do that.

The second thing that I wanted to mention, that the Governor has talked a lot about, is that I want to thank everybody who was involved in the weather warning because hundreds of lives were saved by that: the people at the weather service; the people here in Oklahoma who worked on this; the law enforcement people that went up and down the streets and blared their sirens and were on loudspeakers; the television stations that showed the pictures and the patterns and predictions. Over and over and over, people say how grateful they are for that.

We are working—and one of the things that is in the balanced budget this year that I very much hope will pass is several million dollars more to develop the next system of Doppler radar, which the Governor reminded me was developed here at the University of Oklahoma. And I think it's very important that we continue to improve that.

I also very strongly support establishing a national weather center with the help of Federal funds at the University of Oklahoma, to see what we can do not only to provide even better warning but perhaps to dilute the

strength of some of these very powerful tornadoes before they hit, and we'll be working on that.

The last point I would like to make is something I'd like everyone who lost a home to think about. We believe—no, I take that back—we know that lives can be saved under almost all conditions if there is at least one room properly encased and protected with concrete in a house. Now, in the loans which will be given for rebuilding the homes, 20 percent of the loan money can be used for protective purposes, for preventive purposes. Isn't that right? Yes—to make safe rooms. The average cost of one of these safe closets, if you do it with a closet, is only about \$2,000. The Governor will have discretionary funds available from the Federal Government that will actually permit him to contribute some of that money to families whose incomes are so modest they can't afford it on their own.

So if you don't remember anything else I say today, remember this: For goodness sake, build a safe room in your house when you rebuild. Go in and do the—any kind of alterations you have to do. It will be the cheapest \$2,000 you ever spent. If you don't have the money, get in touch with the right people at the State. We'll try to get them enough money to provide some help. But we will be able to save nearly everybody if we can do this. And in this rebuilding, once again, Oklahoma can show the way for America, if the word gets out that everybody here is determined to have one of these safe, reinforced closets in their homes.

We can't promise you that there will never be another tornado. We can promise you we'll do our best to continue to improve the warning. We'll see if the frontiers of science can widen to the point where we can dilute the strength of the storm. We'll put Oklahoma at the center of that.

But you can do something to help and to set an example for people throughout the United States in the areas that are vulnerable to tornadoes, by rebuilding with these safe and reinforced rooms.

Again, I'm sorry. Our hearts are with you. We'll be with you throughout the rebuilding. But thank you—thank you for once again showing the whole country what is best about America.

God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. in the Del Aire neighborhood at the corner of 42d Street and Angela Drive. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Frank Keating, and his wife, Cathy; Director Raymond Lloyd (Buddy) Young, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Region VI; Mayor Glenn Lewis of Moore, OK; Mayor Harry L. Nelson of Del City, OK; and Mayor Eddie O. Reed of Midwest City, OK.

### **Remarks on Departure From Tinker Air Force Base, Oklahoma, and an Exchange With Reporters**

May 8, 1999

#### ***Bombing of Chinese Embassy in Belgrade***

**The President.** Ladies and gentlemen, as all of you know, last night the NATO airstrikes included a number of command and control targets in Belgrade, targets that involved Mr. Milosevic's ability to do what he has done in Kosovo to run the people out and repress them. Unfortunately, the Chinese Embassy was inadvertently damaged, and people lost their lives, and others have been injured.

It was a tragic mistake, and I want to offer my sincere regret and my condolences to both the leaders and the people of China.

Having said that, let me also remind you that it is clear that we're doing everything we can to avoid innocent civilian casualties. Because the television and other media are in Belgrade, you know every one that's occurred, but I would remind you that well over 10,000 sorties have now been flown, with massive ordinance having been dropped. And that is evidence that we're working very hard to avoid this.

It doesn't remove the sadness from the people in China and from the other innocent civilians that have been hurt, but we are doing our best. And I think it's important to remember why these airstrikes are necessary. Many thousands of Kosovars have been killed. There have been rapes; they have been burned out of their homes; their records have been destroyed; and hundreds of thousands have been turned into refugees.

This can all end tomorrow with an agreement that meets the minimum conditions to